

Military Review's Interview With General Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel, Commander, Colombian Army

COMMANDING what many refer to as a new, motivated, and efficient organization, General Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel, commander of the Colombian army, affirms that “every war is fought with victory in mind.” Major Richard Procell, managing editor of the Latin American editions of *Military Review*, spoke with Mora during his recent visit to Fort Leavenworth. During his visit, Mora was inducted into the International Hall of Fame for international officers who graduated from the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and who have attained distinction in their home countries.—Editor

MR: First, we wish to extend our congratulations to you on your induction into the International Officer Hall of Fame. Our focus will be to analyze the war in Colombia and to determine the Colombian Army's involvement in it.

For decades, the threat—the Colombian Revolutionary Armed Forces (FARC) and the National Liberation Army (ELN) have been tough, persistent, patient insurgents. Both groups seem even stronger because of their involvement with the drug trade and, apparently, because of their association with other international criminal organizations. What in your opinion are the political objectives and military strategies of these organizations, and what do you think they intend to do to achieve them?

Mora: The guerrilla movements that arose during the 1960s adopted a communist doctrine and ideology. The FARC linked itself to what was known as the Moscow line, while the ELN looked to Cuba. Over the years, both organizations grew considerably in numbers and quality. As the drug

problem increased in Colombia, the two movements became more and more involved with the drug trade, which undermined their political base.

Losing political ground, the organizations began attacking those they had vowed to protect—the people who became victims of terrorism. On the other hand, the organizations' increased involvement in

all phases of drug trafficking made them economically powerful. They have the means to acquire all types of weapons through connections in the international black market.

MR: Have the FARC and ELN grown since 1995?

Mora: Growing both in manpower and in means, the FARC now has approximately 16,000 armed men, and it has plans and strategies to eventually take over the government and change the democratic system in Colombia. The ELN

includes approximately 4,500 armed men and has its own plans to change the democratic system.

Energy and fuel infrastructures—the destruction of oil pipelines and electric power structures—are the main targets of these organizations. They attack the population, destroying homes, churches, public buildings, banks, and bridges. They are responsible for kidnappings, massacres, arsons, and hijackings. Civilians in rural areas are their primary victims. The organizations do not rely on popular support; in fact, according to national polls, only 2 percent of the Colombian population support them. They terrorize the population with weaponry obtained through the economic power of drug trafficking.

MR: Could you address the FARC's international efforts?

Mora: Because of their terrorist actions against civilians, the organizations have established contacts

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General Jorge Enrique Mora Rangel, with Lieutenant General James Riley, Commandant of the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College, at the ceremony inducting him into the International Hall of Fame, September 2001.

and exchanges with other terrorist organizations around the world. They have acquired technical combat expertise, especially instruction and training for manufacturing and effectively using explosives and unconventional weapons that can cause great damage and many casualties. The same anti-personnel devices and explosives used in Vietnam and El Salvador are now being used in Colombia. This year, we arrested three Irish Republican Army explosives and arms experts who were teaching their skills and techniques to the FARC.

MR: *How important are psychological warfare, propaganda, and misinformation activities to the FARC?*

Mora: When similar movements have popular support and fight in defense of the people, they are fighting a revolutionary war with political ends. This is not so in Colombia because the organizations have lost their political agenda and are attacking, murdering, and kidnapping civilians—the principal victims of terrorist activities. The movements' actions are designed to instill fear and cause terror by using the weapons in their arsenals. Their use of psychological warfare and propaganda is based on the results of their terrorist acts and demonstrations of force, which naturally produce intimidation.

MR: *Do you believe the FARC is honestly interested in a peace agreement with the Colombian Government?*

Mora: Because of the attitude, statements, and actions of the FARC, I conclude that it has no in-

tention of pursuing the peace that Colombians seek so fervently. The FARC's main interest seems to be to delay the peace process to strengthen its military might. If the FARC is sincerely interested in peace, its message could be delivered to the Colombian people through peaceful gestures. What we see, however, is a strengthening of its military capabilities through recruitment, acquisition of weapons from the black market, and perhaps, even of surface-to-air missiles. One can only surmise that the FARC will continue to augment its military as a means of achieving its purposes and goals.

MR: *What actions do you believe the Colombian Government needs to undertake to satisfy leaders of the FARC and to reach a peace agreement?*

Mora: I do not believe it is a matter of satisfying the terrorist organization. Rather, the Colombian Government is spearheading a peace process that seeks to end the war that these organizations have declared on the people. Colombians long for peace. With great resolve and persistence within constitutional principles, our president is trying to achieve that peace.

MR: *Do operations, such as the recent mobilization of 3,000 soldiers within 48 hours, foretell future activities of the Colombian Army?*

Mora: The Colombian Army began a restructuring process 3 years ago that has resulted in major institutional changes. Our president is committed to the peace process as well as to strengthening and transforming our armed forces.

As a byproduct of the restructuring process, a rapid deployment force was organized. The force consists of three mobile brigades and a special forces brigade, a total of 5,000 soldiers whose deployment is based on military concepts of mass and mobility.

The deployment mentioned was Operation "7th of August" in which we rapidly mobilized nearly 3,000 soldiers against a FARC column, composed of 2,000 FARC combatants, which was trying to accomplish what it called a "campaign." Our operation was a complete success with excellent results, thus neutralizing the organization's terrorist plan. The commander was a casualty, and the column totally disbanded.

MR: *With respect to staff training at brigade and division levels, comparing the Colombian Army's current organization with that of 1995 through 1998, it seems that it operates quite differently from how it did at that point. Can you describe the training that staff officers now receive?*

Mora: A restructured general staff has given us better leadership in planning operations at that level. Our military schools have also undergone important changes. We emphasize the study and analysis of lessons learned from all actions conducted on the battlefield, especially those related to planning. Similarly, we have worked quite intensely to ensure general staff officers dedicate themselves not only to planning but also to the continuing development, direction, and command of operations. I believe we are achieving this, and I believe that at all levels our general staff officers are dedicated to winning this war.

MR: *Will the need for joint planning become greater?*

Mora: The war we fight clearly shows us that we need to operate jointly. If each of the armed forces or services performs independently, we cannot guarantee the achievement of our common operational goals. After all these years, we have acquired new strategies. For example, the majority of our air assault operations are nocturnal. For this, we need experience, coordination, and joint planning. Participants include army troops and helicopter transports as well as air force helicopters and planes that provide air support. It is an established fact that planning and execution require participation by all forces.

MR: *Operations at division and brigade levels still appear to be short-lived. What resources do you*

believe will be necessary to maintain such operations on a long-term basis?

Mora: Guerrilla warfare is characterized by the use of small groups that have significant mobility, can attack, then quickly withdraw without sustaining casualties in an engagement. Because of the duration of the conflict and the growth of guerrilla organizations, they have been able to create numerous columns, and their attacks have become commensurately greater. This requires that brigade-level operations employ support on a larger scale. However, by the very characteristics of the war we now fight, in which the enemy cannot hold terrain in the face of the regular army in combat, we have been

able to sustain those operations with the resources we have throughout the duration of such operations. Past experience with this level of operations highlights the importance of logistic planning to sustain our force. I believe we should pay particular attention to this aspect of the art of war.

MR: *As for the potential of working and operating in decentralized operations, including urban terrorism, how*

is the Colombian Army preparing to confront this?

Mora: Within a historical framework, we have the examples of Vietnam and El Salvador. The development of those wars included the urbanization of conflict. In other words, war was taken into the cities, followed by offensives against the most important towns, including capitals, after which, supposedly, the war would end.

We have studied and analyzed history, as well as FARC and ELN plans, and have found that their intent is to recreate the events of Vietnam and El Salvador. We are preparing for these phases of warfare. Our hope is that through restructuring, acquiring new capabilities, and receiving the support and backing of our people, the war in Colombia will not evolve to such levels of conflict.

MR: *It seems that Plan Colombia has not received the international political and economical support that was expected. To what do you attribute this?*

Mora: Plan Colombia has been a major tool in the war against drugs. This war is international in nature, a matter of supply and demand in which the responsibility must be shared between the countries that produce and those that consume drugs.

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plan that consolidates our efforts. This plan, which should lead to positive results, includes a component representing 25 percent of the military. The most important part has to do with social assistance to urban areas, incentives to voluntarily eradicate coca plants, to strengthen the justice system, and to protect the human rights of those individuals involved in the cultivation of coca.

I believe there has been a misunderstanding of the plan by those unaware of the problems that Colombia faces. Some organizations see the plan as a military plan, which is not correct. Nevertheless, Plan Colombia will prevail, and we shall be able to show positive results.

MR: *In Latin America, particularly in countries that have common borders, there has been concern since the inception of Plan Colombia that not only would guerrillas infiltrate other countries but that the production of cocaine in particular would also spill over the borders. What are your thoughts on this?*

Mora: I believe this is a general concern. In Colombia, a few years ago, we did not have the coca plantations we now have; nor did we produce cocaine. Over time, the country has become home to some of the largest coca plantations in the world, and it is one of the major producers of cocaine. Neutralizing the problem will take a cooperative effort to eliminate coca plantations *anywhere* in the world. We have a moral obligation and must be determined to resolve this terrible dilemma with the assistance of the international community.

MR: *Many self-defense groups, including the Convivir [special protection and private security services], were organized to protect themselves from guerrillas. The government's responsibility was to legitimize their existence. Could you tell us something about the relationship between the Colombian Army and those organizations?*

Mora: The self-defense groups existed legitimately for a number of years. They were made up of members of the rural population organized to defend their homes and towns from guerrilla attacks. With the advent of the drug problem and the forming of cartels in Colombia, the cartels began fighting among themselves and the guerrillas for territorial control. The cartels then began to solicit the self-defense groups to join them in confronting the guerrillas. This process corrupted the self-defense groups.

The cartels strengthened the self-defense groups militarily, which caused them to lose their defensive posture and to become criminal organizations that began to take the offensive instead. Faced with this development, the government declared such

self-defense groups as lawbreakers, and they became clandestine organizations. Later, the Colombian Government legitimized some groups, known as the Convivir, which were made up of civilians in small towns and cities. Their philosophy was to support the police and army with information and real-time communications concerning illegal acts to help state forces in their preventive or repressive measures. This did not work and was short-lived.

There are now no legitimate self-defense groups. Therefore, the existence of self-defense groups in Colombia might be puzzling. The explanation lies in the tactics of intimidation, threats, destruction, and guerrilla terrorism against the very population the groups purport to defend. Self-defense becomes the populations' response to the guerrillas' terrorist nature. The army's responsibility is to fight the war against the guerrillas and the self-defense groups to protect the people.

MR: *Does collaboration with the insurgents exist?*

Mora: These types of internal conflicts can create sympathizers within our ranks. In such cases, where this has been determined, we have taken the appropriate disciplinary or legal measures, and those involved are discharged. The army must be legitimate, and this is obtained through a disciplined institution, one with high moral values, integrated by honest and respectful men who show the people their commitment to the defense of their countrymen.

MR: *The armed forces, then, are taking action against those members within its ranks who are involved as sympathizers. Do you believe that because some soldiers are involved with paramilitary groups and guerrillas that this justifies denying political and/or economic support to the Colombian Government by the international community?*

Mora: No. The international community understands that we are fighting a war against drugs and against certain organizations that cause considerable damage to our nation and that Colombia needs support. Colombia is a country that wants to live in peace, but socially and economically there is a lot to be desired.

Our people require important changes, and change is what our president and government pursue. The poorest and most humble people suffer the most because of war. Fortunately, the army has considerable support. Polls taken during the past few years show that the army comes first among all of Colombia's institutions in prestige and in receiving the people's trust. This shows the international community that the people love and support their army.

MR: *Could you address the army's efforts with social communication?*

Mora: In the type of war we are fighting there is a need to keep the public informed about what we are doing and how we are doing it. Because the people are aware of the details of the war being fought, they support their institutions. The army's communications systems allow the public to be intimately informed about guerrilla and self-defense group activities, the damage these organizations cause, and what the army is doing to defend the public. Because of this we have great support, and this spontaneous and sincere support is instrumental in winning the war.

The army has a network of 23 broadcasting stations that are part of the army's chain of satellite-connected radio stations. The network broadcasts messages and institutional information throughout the country. This allows us to inform the public, but it also allows us to reach the guerrillas and the self-defense groups with messages admonishing them to desist in their efforts to harm the public.

MR: *What about the advances made in your recruitment efforts? I understand you have a human rights officer in each of your battalions.*

Mora: The human rights issue is a fundamental one. In a country at war, it is of utmost importance. We know that if we have the heart, support, and backing of the Colombian people, we will win. The way to receive such backing and support is to respect people's rights. To get to that point, we had to make important changes. Our men have been made conscious of the need for mutual respect.

In every army battalion, there is an officer or non-commissioned officer (NCO) in charge of the office of human rights. We hold seminars, inviting graduates of military schools to participate, and have the support of the International and National Red Cross, who hold conferences for our units. The International Red Cross has an important and considerable presence in Colombia and is quite familiar with how our army operates. Our soldiers are well prepared, know the respect they owe to our people, and are familiar with the regulations pertaining to international humanitarian rights.

In several units, the army has created a human rights area. During training, as soldiers progress through infantry, gymnastics, and other physical training areas, they also pass through a human rights area. The area consists of 10 to 12 stations where

soldiers encounter situations in which a decision must be made about an incident that will affect people's rights and how the decision applies to and will affect international humanitarian rights. Our soldiers learn how to act and how to respond on the battlefield. At all army schools, officers and NCOs receive several hours of instruction concerning this subject. The International Red Cross, the Colombian Red Cross, and public universities oversee the courses. The courses also meet the requirements of our agreements with other countries that support us in training soldiers.

I believe the Colombian Army has made great progress, and that progress is recognized by the international community and by human

rights nongovernmental organizations. The greatest show of support and appreciation is that shown by the Colombian people to the soldiers and the army as an institution.

MR: *Can the guerrillas be defeated?*

Mora: Every war is fought with victory in mind. Our soldiers are clear as to what it means to win this war. Winning does not mean killing all of the guerrillas; that has not been possible anywhere. Neither does it mean destroying our towns and cities. Further, harming our own population by using our resources and the forces against them would by no means represent a victory. To the Colombian soldier, winning this war means finishing off—destroying—the organizations' will to fight and showing their adherents that they will never rule Colombia. If we are able to achieve this, if our successes make these groups understand that the only solution to the conflict is found within the process of negotiations that favor the Colombian Government, we shall achieve the peace we seek.

MR: *In conclusion?*

Mora: I have always been a dedicated reader of *Military Review*. I wish to express through its pages to other militaries of the world that the message of the Colombian people is one of hope and friendship. We are fighting a war against drugs and terrorism. We will be victorious because the Colombian soldier believes in its cause. He feels the backing and definite support of our people and of the international community who regard us with respect and profound admiration for the sacrifices we are making to save a people from this terror and affront. **MR**

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